

## Scientifically speaking by gaps42

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**Summary:**

Max stares at him with wide eyes. "That - That's a crush. What you just described is a crush. Do you have a crush on Lucas?"

A henclair love story in three parts.

## Scientifically speaking

### Author's Note:

- For [Jen](#).

This is for @Jen who requested Max orchestrating henclair admitting their feelings for one another alshgjslfhj;l I included this in my Learning series because it takes place in the same timeline, but it's just post-season two so you don't have to read the rest of the collection if you're not into elmax!!! It just feels more organized to me! First time writing Dustin or venturing out of the elmax tag so be kind but I hope somebody has as much fun reading this as I did writing it!!!

Objectively, Dustin likes to think he's got a fairly scientific mind. He's top of all his science classes, he has at least three projects going on at home on his own time, and he saw the world-shattering possibilities of D'art's existence, thank you very much, even though he can admit that the actual real-world applications of keeping D'art were perhaps not the most realistic. Still, Dustin finds beauty in seeing the world through a scientific lens, delving into and dissecting every individual aspect of the details of the universe around him with such enthusiasm that his findings often get obscured in the convoluted layers of his excitable explanations. This often means that the only one willing to listen to his ramblings ends up being his science teacher, growing more weary with every grade he moves up in high school, or Lucas, who seems to live to pick apart every idea or conclusion he comes to, scientific or not. Dustin likes that Lucas challenges him - every great scientist needs to face adversity lest they become complacent - but a part of him is so tired of arguing with the Lucas in his mind before he even opens his mouth that he half-considers waiting until he's accepting the Nobel peace prize for his groundbreaking scientific discoveries before mentioning it to his best friend.

"I just don't get how all he can see are problems," Dustin complains, leaning his weight onto his hands behind him as he cranes his neck to look up at the night sky above them. "Not fully understanding

something is good in science."

Max hums, waterfall of red hair almost brushing the porch they're perched on as she tilts her head back to take a swig of her soda. "Not according to every science teacher I've ever had," she says once she's swallowed noisily.

Dustin rolls his eyes at her, even though she's kept her head tilted backwards to look up at the stars and can't see him. "It means you're on the right track," he explains. "You're going the right direction in scientific discovery when you have new data to analyse or questions to explore."

Max purses her lips as she considers this, pale eyes unseeing as she gazes steadily up at the stars. "Like running into a fuck-ton of enemies in a video game."

Dustin laughs, adjusting his weight on his hands. "Yeah, kind of. The point is science is a way of understanding the world around us, and a new idea should be met with curiosity, not ridicule."

"A ridiculous idea should be met with ridicule," Max points out, and grins when he swats her shoulder with his knuckle.

"Don't you start now," he warns, and scowls deeply at her snicker. "I already have a Lucas original, I don't need a Lucas accomplice mocking me even when he's not here."

"I can mock you on my own merit, thank you very much." She takes a sip of her soda and wriggles sideways on the step to lean her back against the porch railing, nudging his thigh with the sole of her scuffed sneakers. "You guys have been friends for a hundred years, why is this just starting to bother you now?"

"It isn't," Dustin says. "It's not just recent, we've been arguing forever. And it doesn't bother me, realistically, it more..." He trails off, lifting his chin to look up at the stars as he tries to organize what he's trying to express. "I don't understand why he can't just take my discoveries at face value," he grumbles.

Max grins from behind the bottle she's half-raised to her lips. "You want to impress him," she teases.

Dustin feels himself blush out of nowhere, and he's so flummoxed he can't keep the defensiveness out of his voice when Max raises her eyebrows at him. "I don't need to impress him," he protests, and tugs the brim of his hat down over his burning face, even though it's so dark he can barely see Max's face from across the porch. "Just some basic appreciation would be nice."

"Why do you care so much what he thinks of your nerdy science

projects?" Max says, pushing his leg obnoxiously with the sneaker she still has balanced against his thigh. "I thought it was all about *scientific innovation and discovery*."

"It is," Dustin allows. "But I work really hard on them. He's always nice about your, I don't know, your skateboard tricks."

"My skateboard tricks are cool," Max says, and takes a smug sip of her soda when he shoves her foot with his leg. "He was only nice about them at first, when he was attempting to flirt with me. Badly, I might add. I was kind of relieved when he started razzing me like he does the rest of you, to be honest. He's only like that with people he's close to."

"But then you broke up," Dustin points out with a frown. Max and Lucas act almost exactly the same as friends as they did as a couple, besides the kissing, which Dustin admits was a relief to be rid of at every party gathering. He'd initially been worried this relief had been because he still had feelings for Max, but although he recognizes that she is beautiful, his appreciation of her feels objectively observational. He wonders, now, watching pale moonlight bathe her long hair and soft features, if his initial interest in her had been born from Lucas's attention suddenly shifting to focus on her.

Max shrugs, apparently less bothered by her breakup with Lucas than Dustin is. "Yeah, but we're closer now. There's no weirdness any more. From anyone, even Mike treats me like part of the group now instead of 'The annoying one who's dating Lucas.'"

Dustin doesn't really see the problem with being seen in the role of 'the one who's dating Lucas,' but he can admit that he understands her desire to distinguish herself from Mike's initial reaction to her. "Yeah, it's nice now that Mike's stopped being an asshole and recognizes your place in the party," he agrees, and Max's playful shove with her foot is belied by the soft smile on her face. "Although that might have more to do with his girlfriend than anything," he adds with a laugh.

He expects Max to laugh with him, but she ducks her head to let her long hair fall over her face and takes a long drink from her soda silently. As soon as the party had accepted El back into the group with open arms and Max had emphatically disproved her fears about the redhead having romantic feelings for Mike, El had begun following Max around like a baby duckling, listening to anything she said no matter the level of importance with wide, fascinated eyes and mirroring her every movement and gesture with serious

concentration as if trying to get it exactly right. El's sudden, adorable attachment to the other girl in the group had made it impossible for Mike to continue his resentful tirade against her, and Dustin was fairly certain now that he wasn't dealing with the loss of El. Mike didn't want to continue it at all, but Max had been so enthusiastic about stealing El away from her boyfriend at every opportunity. Dustin is surprised that the mere mention of it makes her curl in on herself so tightly her sneaker slips off of its perch on his leg.

"Lucas thinks your science junk is cool," she says instead of answering him, and slouches down the wall to take a noisy gulp of her soda.

It's enough to distract him, however, and he perks up so drastically his sneakers scrabble against the pavement a bit. "He said that?"

"Yeah," Max says with a long-suffering eyeroll. "You know Lucas, he nerds out about stuff for hours after everyone else is done talking about it. Not as bad as you do, but I still had to hear about it whenever he took me out on a date or whatever."

Something flutters deep in Dustin's stomach at the revelation that Lucas talked about him when he was alone with Max. "What kinds of stuff?"

Max shrugs. "Dunno. Boring stuff. It felt like being in science class, to be honest. He gives you a hard time, but I thought that was your thing, you know? Do you really think he doesn't like the stuff you're interested in?"

Dustin sits up to nudge his hat back out of his face, frowning in thought. "No, I know he likes science and learning and stuff, but I want him to like *my* stuff. Before it was okay when he razzed me because he was always right there beside me, making whatever I was working on better, but now he's playing sports and dating and dumping girls and he's giving me the same amount of grief without the same amount of attention and nothing is as fun when he's not there with me. None of my projects are interesting to him any more and I don't know why that bothers me so much, but I want to be... I don't know, the interesting friend again."

He clamps his mouth shut and glances at his friend hesitantly, waiting for the tidal wave of mockery he's sure is coming from the rant he hadn't even realized was inside of him in the first place, but Max is staring at him with wide eyes in the faint moonlight. "That's - That's a crush," she says slowly. "What you're describing is a crush. Do you have a crush on Lucas?"

Dustin laughs, nudging her knee with his elbow playfully, but she

keeps staring at him unblinkingly. His stomach flutters again under her relentless gaze, and his grin wavers a bit. "Um, okay, Max, I get it," he says, shifting a bit uncertainly when she doesn't smile back. "That was the world's dumbest rant, I know. The joke's over now."

"It's not dumb, Dustin," Max says softly. She scrambles to sit upright, and alarm flares in Dustin's stomach when he sees her eyes are more earnest than he's ever seen them before. "Do you have feelings for him? It's okay if you do."

"Friendship... Feelings," Dustin says slowly, searching her face for any indication of mockery. Max loves to tease as much as the rest of the party, aside from El, but she's never let a joke go on long enough that it becomes cruel, and the alarm in his stomach creeps through his body to ring in his ears when she keeps holding his eyes seriously. "Feelings of friendship. What - What are you talking about?" He tries to laugh, but it comes out more high-pitched and tight with building hysteria than he means it to.

"I mean, I know you guys have been dealing with bullies's bullshit about gay being an insult your whole lives, but if you like Lucas as more than a friend than it's not a bad thing," Max says with strength in her voice bordering on defensiveness, and the ringing in Dustin's ears drowns out every sound in the quiet night around them for a dizzying moment. She says something else, but Dustin keeps staring at her, as unblinking as she had been only a moment ago, the alarm taking up residence in his chest and squeezing his heart like a vice. He blurts out his thoughts even though he knows she's still talking. "I can't be gay. I've liked girls before."

"Bisexual, then," Max says, with a shrug like she hasn't just turned his world on its axis more than finding D'art in his garbage had. "There are people who like anybody."

"There are?" Dustin says with surprise, his scientific mind eagerly latching onto this new information while the rest of him keeps screaming wordlessly like it has been for the past full minute. "How do you know this stuff?"

"I'm from California," Max says, like that explains everything. "Think about it, how do you feel when Lucas is around? When he's paying attention to you, and just you?"

Dustin shakes his head slowly, focusing with new curiosity on the fluttering in his stomach at Lucas's name. "I'm not -We're friends, though. I can want him around as a friend."

"Do you feel the same way with anyone else in the party?" Max says.

Dustin takes his hat off. He isn't completely sure why, but he feels as if the overwhelming feeling of this moment deserves a dramatic gesture. "I don't know," he says softly. "I have no - How do you qualify emotions as they pertain to different people?"

Max smiles at him, soft and with enough defeated understanding that something in Dustin's muddled brain starts to shift curiously, but before he can fully form the thought Max slides her backside across the porch and nudges his knee with her own. "Here's an easier one," she says quietly. "How did you feel when you saw him with me?"

Dustin looks down at his knees, twisting his hat in his hands like his heart twists in his chest. "Like a bad friend," he whispers.

Max winces, and Dustin is about to apologize when she lifts an arm to wrap around his shoulders and smiles up at the night sky above them. "You're a good friend, Dustin," she says, and despite everything he finds himself smiling genuinely as she squeezes his shoulders. "You never put your feelings on him so you're okay," she says, keeping her eyes stubbornly on the stars even when he shifts to try to catch her gaze.

"It never occurred to me that I could want him like that," Dustin says with wonder, mind feeling slow for the first time he can remember as it turns this new information over. He wonders if there are books in the library to research this, and if the librarian will ever let him back in to check. "I never heard about gay people outside of, like, New York, let alone Hawkins."

Max's mouth twists with amusement. "They don't just pop into existence once you hit big cities, wastoid."

Dustin grins, glad of the glimpse of his friend beneath the serious expression focused on the night sky above them. "Bisexual, huh," he muses. "I don't know. How do you know if it fits?"

"You know," Max murmurs, leaning her head onto his shoulder without taking her eyes off of the stars.

Dustin doesn't think he's ever just *known* anything in his life, not without serious consideration and a scientific examination of all possible conclusions, but he imagines Lucas leaning against him instead of Max, staring up at the same stars he is the way they have countless times over the years, and he thinks, somewhere in the clouded part of his brain, he may know what she means.

He wonders, leaning his head on top of Max's as the world turns around them, if this is the scientific discovery which will finally hold Lucas's attention.

**Author's Note:**

Thanks so much for the request @Jen, I haven't had as much time to write this summer as I thought I would so far but I'll post part two as soon as I can!!!  
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